

## Conversation with 88 year old black female, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi (Transcription)

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Q. Where where are you from originally?

A. My home is in Alabama.

Q. Oh, what part?

A. Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Q. Okay; So well, how long have you lived in Mississippi?

A. I've been here ever since 1940. The second Thursday in August.

Q. Ah.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Well that's probably long enough for you to have seen a lot of changes.

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A. Well, I have, but, you know, they gets on my mind and goes off.

Q. Yeah, well, have you lived in Starkville all those years since you've been here?

A. Uh-huh Yes, I have.

Q. And what, what have you noticed that has changed about Starkville?

A. Well I noticed that, you know. the - Starkville have growed since I been here. When <I?  
> come here it was small.

Q. Yeah.

A. But now it's a large place. It's almost a city.

Q. Uh-huh. Really is.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. You live in a convenient location right here.

A. Well, thank you. When I first bought this home down here, taken the man the money back and told him I didn't wait it cause it was a ditch out there. And he told me: he say well Mary you're making the biggest mistake ever was. So I was glad I changed, he changed

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my, he changed my mind, not me. And So I built my home here in 1948. I moved in this house in the second week in July.

Q. Gosh, you're good at dates. You remember when you did everything.

A. Well, that's what Ms. Shaw tells me all the time. I can remember, you know, dates pretty good.

Q. Yeah?

A. Uh-huh. When I first came here I was a Mary Thomas, and me and my husband went, moved back to Alabama and was-he, I separated and come back cause I was working for a lady used to run the Border plant. I don't know whether you know where the Border plant is here.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. Well, I worked there 14 years, and I done had 3 jobs in my life: I worked at one till I married and come over here. And the reason I quit working there I I didn't like the cooking 3 meals a day. Kept me ? Sunday, Monday, all through the week. So now I've been with Ms. Shaw ever since 1958, the 8th of May.

Q. That's a long time, another date you remember. I bet Ms. Shaw's ncie to work for; she seems like a nice lady.

A. She is; sometimes she's cro-cro-cro-what you call it?

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Q. Crotchety?

A. Yeah Sometimes she's grouchy (crotchety) and I am too, so us get together and I'm staying there, I was the

11

When her husband passed.

Q. Yeah.

A. So My husband passed in 1970, the last of October.

Q. Yeah. This is a nice porch.

A. Well thank you; thank you.

Q. It's cool out here, really.

A. And it's cool here all the - I reckon it's on a kind of that tree. Put shade in here

Q. Ummm. That does help.

A. Yeah Ms. Moselle told me Friday you might call.

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Q. Oh, did she? I haven't seen her since then, so I didn't know whether she had told you or not.

A. Yes, ma'am

Q. Yeah, I've been hunting for people. It's, it's kind of hard to find people who've lived here a long time.

A. Well, some of them been here longer than I have.

Q. Yeah. How is Mississippi different from Alabama or is it different?

A. Oh, I I tell you one thing the peoples over here is kinder to me than they is in Alabama; they're friendly what I'm talking about, white and colored.

Q. Yeah.

A. Well, they're not like that in Alabama.

Q. I wonder why not?

A. I don't know, and it could be me now.

Q. Was this street paved when you bought the house?

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A. Oh no. Wasn't no street out there at all.

Q. Oh really?

A. Wasn't no street out there at all when I bought this house. It wasn't nothing down here. This used to be a big pasture. Cows was in here when I first come in, and I lived over on Fellowship Street, over there by the cemetery.

Q. Yeah. Yeah. Well so when you, when there was not a street out there, how did you get to the house?

A. Well you just had to make a, you know, They made a road.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Uh-huh. And it didn't go no further than that. You see that red sign there?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Well that's far as the, it went, you know, the road would go. And A few years they built up there on, the white peoples built up there on Pleasant Acres.

Q. Uh-huh. Yeah. Course That street's pretty busy now that they've built Kroger over there, and people are always whipping along.

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A. Oh Yes, ma'am.

Q. I bet - is there a lot more traffic along here now than just say a few years ago?

A. Oh yes ma'am. And you just wait till school start. See it's a a high school that's back there.

Q. Uh-huh. yeah. That does make it pretty busy.

<12?>

Q. What do you think is the biggest thing that's changed in Starkville that you can remember since you've been here? How's it, what, what's changed more? Do you think-

A. I'm trying to see - Oh, I know - The biggest change I can think of - hey there, son - is when the segregation come through here. Now that's the biggest change I remember, and I can think made a good change; and all us got together now and we still together doing fine.

Q. Yeah, I think so. You know it's funny in, the churches still don't seem-there are not many black and white people together in church.

A. Sure is. You sure telling the truth.

Q. I don't know why.

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A. I don't either; but it's not-it's like that all over, and that's funny.

Q. Yeah. I've wondered about that.

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. But it's-

A. Now I used to - Dr. Harris out at the college. You know her, don't you?

Q. Who?

A. Dr. Harris.

Q. Phoebe Harris, yeah she lives near me.

A. Do she?

Q. Uh huh.

A. Well I, she always pick, She picks me up sometime and I go out to her church.

Q. Uh huh. What church is that?



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A. It's a church out here; I forget the name of it- Out here on 25.

Q. Uh-huh. Maybe Lutheran Church.

A. Yeah That's it. That's it. Uh-huh. That's it.

Q. Is it, Is it different from your church or-?

A. Well I tell you, I ain't been to no meetings. Now, when she have programs or something like that she, you know, comes by and carries a heap of us colored peoples over there. Because - And you know it's good to go to these places.

Q. Yeah.

A. I tell you why because once a white lady got up and told us: Said, now y'all colored people, she say, I'm getting up to tell y'all that the governor got something going. He, She say and if you don't mind you'll lose your home, when you die your peoples won't have nothing. She said but here what I want to let you know: Hold your home. Say, when they want to renew your home, don't do it, she say, because it'll go to the governor and not to your people So that's why I didn't have my house renewed.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And it's a heap of us there and heard her and had it renewed and now they sorry.

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Q. Yeah. Umm. That is interesting to know.

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. There are all kinds of things like that you need to <gap> What was it like when you were, were a little child in Tuscaloosa.

A. Oh, I used to - oh, I <was?> on the farm.

Q. What all did you do out there?

A. I, You want to know what I did, sure enough?

Q. Huh huh.

A. I'd plow and helped my daddy plow this week.

Q. Really?

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A. Cross my heart. And next week I'd help my mother and them catch up with the chopping. then I'd hitch that mule up myself and plow and go home and eat my dinner and come, come back to the field and plow till 5:00.

Q. Gosh. Pretty hard work.

A. I did that till I was 15 years old. And I left there.

Q. Which part of that did you like the best, or did you like any of it?

A. I, I liked, I liked it all. I like to farm.

Q. Really. Yeah.

A. Yes, ma'am. Cause now I have my chickens and my garden back there. And I'm crippled with arthritis so bad I can't hardly go.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. So, you got a garden here?

A. I did have one, but I didn't have nairn this year because I just wasn't able to.

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Q. Yea.

A. But I got my chickens out there and my dog. I used to have hogs.

Q. What kind of dog you got?

A. I got a-what you call these here little- cocker spaniel.

Q. Cocker spaniel; yeah, I love dogs.

Q. This is probably a pretty good year not to have a garden since it's been so crazy with the weather.

A. Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am.

Q. I tried to plant tomatoes and they all died.

A. Sure enough. Ms. Shaw tried to have some and hers died.

Q. She sure has pretty roses, doesn't she.

A. Yes ma'am, she do. Now all these flowers she give me and I come home, I was younger than I am now, and planted those flowers out there.

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Q. Those are so pretty. I'm surprised that they're doing so well this summer with-You know we haven't had any rain now in a long time.

A. But I waters them.

Q. Uh-huh. Yeah. Well, Do you have some that grow all year, I mean different ones all year around?

A. Yes ma'am, yes ma'am.

Q. That's so pretty. I like that.

Q. So back to what it was like in, in Tuscaloosa when you were a child, what did you do when you were 15? You said you left.

A. Well, I was on the farm, and I left there and went to town.

Q. Oh okay. What did you do-Did your family move to town or you just left?

A. No, I went All by myself.

Q. what did you do?

A. I satyed with some white people till I was 27 years old.

## Library of Congress

Q. Ah, and that's when you met your husband, I bet.

A. It is; and I was glad I met him cause I was tired of cooking 3 meals a day and cleaned up

Q. Yeah. But cooking's kind of fun in a way.

A. Oh, I don't -

Q. Not 3 meals a day. I like to just cook once in a while.

A. And that was Sunday, Monday, all through the year I had to cook 3 meals a day.

Q. Do you do much cooking now?

<14?>

A. I had a sister living with me, but she died. I cooked then, but since she passed about 2 years ago I don't do much cooking. Well, Ms. Shaw feeds me. She cooks my dinner.

Q. Yeah, she's a good cook too, isn't she.

A. Yes, she is too.

Q. How did you meet your husband?

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A. In Tuscaloosa?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Well, I'd go to church; he was a usher, and he got liking me, and me and him married. Married in Columbus.

Q. Oh. Well, do you have any children?

A. No, ma'am.

Q. No children.

A. No ma'am.

A. And my last husband, he was-married him here. His home was in Louisville, Mississippi; and me and him, a old lady stopped him one day and told him, say, Here's a widow, say, don't you want to marry her. He said: I, Yeah, I'd be glad to. SO me and him married, and we lived together until 1970. He died in 1970.

Q. What did he do for a living?

A. Railroad.

Q. Railroad, here in Starkville?

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A. Umm. Yeah. Used to-That was when they was, you know, working on the railroad here, but they don't do that now.

Q. Yeah, I was thinking I hadn't seen much railroad work going on. You know they used to have a train that ran right through the campus.

A. Well, I'm telling you now: My-That's the reason me and my husband was transferred over here. Henry Thomas. He was-He'd clean the engine and I'd clean the coaches.

Q. Really, did you like that?

A. I did love it.

Q. I think it'd be kind of fun. Did you get to ride the train free?

A. Yes, ma'am, I didn't have to pay. I left here and went over in Canada, <and?> New York, Chicago, and St. Louis.

Q. Gosh, you got around. But you came back to Mississippi.

A. Yes ma'am, Oh, I was just, you know,

Q. Just traveling.



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A. Yeah, Yes ma'am. Vacations.

Q. Some people go on vacations and never come back, but-

A. Well I come back here cause I had cone bought-The last time I went, I went Chicago, and they begged me to stay there and I told them I just couldn't stay. I had a home and a husband to see after.

Q. Yeah, Starkville's kind of nice too, I think, compared to big cities like Chicago.

A. I wouldn't live in a big city.

Q. Huh-huh. I wouldn't either.

A. I don't like it.

Q. Yeah They're kind of scary.

A. Sure is.

<15?>

Q. Round here it's, I don't know, you just kind of get a safe feeling around here.

A. You sure do. Yes ma'am.

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Q. Well, let me think. What- See if I can think of anything else to ask you about the difference between growing up in Alabama and livig as an adult in Mississippi. It- of course, you know, It's really not very far from here to Tuscaloosa.

A. Oh no, huh-huh.

Q. Do you still get back over there and visit? Do you have any-

A. Yes ma'am. I goes over there. See I have 3 sisters and nieces and nephews there.

Q. Ah, so you get to go back and visit them. Do they ever come over here to visit?

A. Sure they do.

Q. That's pretty convenient living that close to your family.

A. Sure is. I dos pretty good. I fell and broke, fell out there and broke my ankle and the doctor put a Dr. Gassaway put pin in my ankle. And it just put the rhuematism in it from here on down. And that's the reason I'm on that s

Q. Yeah, well, Do you walk up to Ms. Shaw's house?

A. Oh no'm, I drive.

Q. You drive. I was just thinking, you know, it's so close; right around the corner. But-

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A. I used to walk up there but I got to the place I couldn't -

Q. Yeah, that hill looks pretty pretty steep to go up. What did you do when it snowed that time a couple of years ago?

A. I don't go, She tells me don't come to work when it snows.

Q. Yeah, course that's about the only snow we've had now in a long time.

A. Sure is.

Q. But that was a big one; I loved it.

A. I did too; I enjoyed it. I likes winter anyway better than I do summertime.

Q. Oh, I don't know I kind of like summer.

A. I do. I was born the 17th of March, St. Patrick's Day.

Q. Oh really? My birthday's March 16th.

Q. That's a good time of year to be born, I think.

A. It ain't too hot and it ain't too cold.

## Library of Congress

Q. Yeah. It's perfect. March and October are my favorite months around here.

A. Well, I declare.

Q. Skating. I haven't-see that little girl skating? I haven't been on roller skates in years.

A. You have children?

Q. No, don't. What did you do for fun when you were working on the farm? What did you do when you didn't have to work?

A. What I did?

Q. Did you all go swimming in swimming holes and things?

A. No ma'am, no ma'am, no ma'am, Mamma would take us to fishing sometime. But we had to keep around that house spotless clean, and you can look in here and tell I'm telling the truth. She used to, We used to hang clothes out and she would see them on the line, she would make us take them down and wash them over again.

Q. Why?

A. That's cause they wouldn't be clean. ? clean. And They would be. Cause my older sister. She'd do the washing and I'd do the rinsing. Sometime I put them on the wire, on the wire, and wouldn't rinse th

## Library of Congress

<16?>

Q. Sounds like she kept you in line.

A. Yes ma'am. We, we had a strict mother.

Q. well, you must have done some playing though.

A. Well we'd play, you know, around the yard, but didn't go play with the other children and to to church every Sunday. And my sister, after we growed up, 14 years old, We was joining of the Church - we lived right at it - and we would clean the church up. Put water in there on a Sunday.

Q. Of course, children now don't do much playing cause they watch TV so much.

A. And walk the streets so much.

Q. Uh huh. Uh-huh. yeah. Do you like to watch TV?

A. No.

Q. You don't?

A. Never have.

## Library of Congress

Q. I never have either, really. But so many people spend all their time watching TV.

A. Watching TV- ? Stories. I tell my friends, I say I'm here-I sit here and crochet.

Q. It's a lot better thing to do--have something to show for it.

A. Well, that's what I do. I get there, making a cover for my couch in there now-

Q. Well, that's great. A great skill to have.

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. Yeah, I guess TV is one of the ways things have changed.

A. You sure telling the truth. <gap> It was bad on the children and some of the old peoples too.

Q. Uh-huh, Of course, air conditioning too is another way we've changed.

A. That sure is. But I don't care for them.

Q. Yeah, I don't either.

A. My husband got one there and one in the living room. I got two. But I got two fans. that's what I-three fans.

## Library of Congress

Q. I like fans a lot better.

A. I do too.

Q. Yeah, I like the freash air, somehow.

A. Me too.

Q. But, but So many people just sit in air conditioned houses in front of the TV set all the time.

A. All, that's the way my peoples are right there, right there. Do you see?

Q. Uh-huh, uh-huh, ye And my mother tells me about what it was like when radio first was invented. You know, I can't remember, I mean we always had a radio when I was little, but you probably remember before radio too, don't you?

A. Sure I do.

Q. That, That means life was really different then without radio or TV or cars, too.

A. Sure was. I remember when I seed the first car. It was a T-model Ford.

Q. Who was it that had it?

## Library of Congress

A. The white peoples what we was staying on the place.

Q. I bet everybody ran around to at it!

A. Look at that car. And the next thing I remember was a airplane. We's in the field and they'd come over there and wondered what it was.

Q. Gosh, times have changed

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. a whole lot; yeah, but back in the days before cars you wouldn't have thought it was long at all to walk up there to Ms. Shaw's.

A. Sure wouldn't

Q. and now we've use cars. we used to walk 9 miles to church every Sunday.

Q. Gosh - that's pretty far to walk. But you know it really is nice living where you do that, like if something happened to your car, if you had a flat tire or something you could still walk to you know, all kinds of places around here close.

A. Oh yeah. I used to but I can't walk far now. On a kind of my knee. But when my car out of fix she come and get me. Ms. Shaw do.



## Library of Congress

<17?>

A. Well, Ms. Moselle is a sweet person.

Q. She really is.

A. Ms. Moselle is sweet lady. She just as kind hearted as she can be. She like her daddy. She had the sweetest daddy. And I, it take me so long to get over his death.

Q. Yeah - when - He died, let me see, late 60's I think, it was right before I came - I moved here in January of 70 and I think he had not been dead long then.

A. I don't think so. I think he died in November if I'm not mistaken.

Q. Yeah, I think he he was out hunting, wasn't he? So it must have been hunting season.

A. Yeah, down there on the lake, he went to hunt. And he done wrote her the sweetest note when he <unintelligible text>

Q. I think one of the grandchildren was with him when he died, or was-

A. No, just some of the students. He had them sit in his station wagon and just wait until the gate unlock. And they was sitting there talking and he told them, said y'all ?. They say y'all let me go first. And that's when they, when they went through the gate the seen him laying out there. That was a sad day for us.

## Library of Congress

Q. Ummm. Yeah. I guess you got to know all, all Ms. Shaw's grandchildren, all those 4 boys.

A. I sure do know them cause I got all their pictures in the house there.

Q. Uh-huh. Have you met the- Richard and Ed's wives, you know

A. Oh yes ma'am.

A. and their children then.

A. I ain't never seed Richard's baby, but I've seed little Ed's two children.

Q. They are so cute.

A. They sure is. And that little Samuel, he is cute as he can be.

Q. Yeah, I understand Richard's baby is really really cute too. And that he, he's the one who broke his leg or something when he was just about 6 months old.

A. Sure did, uh-huh.

Q. They say He ran around in that cast like everything.

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A. Yes ma'am. I was right there. I, I thinks about them when they was little. I'd be-one day I <be?> sitting there - he was - little Ed was sitting on the couch, the others was in school. And I was - something come on the TV - say a walking bear, and - a talking bear, and I was looking at it. He say, looked up at me, he say, Mary, I say, huh, grandmother ain't paying you to watch no TV; she paying you to work. I say being as you say that I'm gonna sit down and <unintelligible text>

Q. That sounds like something a little boy would say.

A. Yeah, Ms. Moselle, you ought to have grabbed him up and spanked him. I said that was funny to me. Yeah, I been around them ever since they were little bitty children.

Q. I guess Sid and Robert don't get home very much cause they live way out in San Francisco. But now wait, Sid was home recently. That's right.

A. Yeah, that's what I'm fixing to say now. He was here Christmas. And he done been back again cause when he came here he taken with the flu, and he didn't get to see his grandmother and he come back to see her.

Q. Yeah, they love their grandmother.

A. She's so good to them.

Q. Uh-huh. Yeah. Well, let me think. What's what's the difference between country life and city life, or small town life? Like out on the farm-

## Library of Congress

A. Well, it's been so long, I couldn't hardly - huh huh - I don't know nothing about that much-

Q. But you like being in town here?

A. I likes it you know, I like a little town; I don't like a big town. There come the  
<unintelligible text>

Q. I was wondering what all that noise was.

18

A. Sweeping the street

Q. Yeah, I guess that is it.

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